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ABSTRACT

This paper is a basic resource that may be used as an outline for a curricular unit which is intended to be a comprehensive introduction to the Dance of India. Interwoven with the factual, historical, and descriptive material are observations, perceptions, and connections based on the author's experience in the Fulbright seminar in India. The conclusions, obviously from a Western perspective, could be used as a starting point for discussion and debate regarding current trends in Indian dance. The paper provides both historical and contemporary information on dance of India. Contains a glossary and a list of: Indian dance resources, audio/visual resources, and teaching materials available in the U.S.A. (Author/EH)

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# Jammin' with Shiva: Tradition and Transformation of the Dance in India Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad, 1997 (India)

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Ann A. Bergeron

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Dear Dr. Lavakore,

Here is my project! Thank you so much for patience. I enjoyed putting it together, rethinking and compiling my experiences.

Many thanks for everything you have done to build such a wonderful program and organization. My best to all.

Most Sincerely,

Ann A. Bergeron

# Jammin' with Shiva:

# Tradition and Transformation of the Dance in India

Ann A. Bergeron
1997 Fulbright-Hays Seminar
"Continuity and Change: India on the Threshold of the 21st Century"

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**To the Reader:**

This document is a basic resource that may be used as an outline for a curricular unit which is intended to be a comprehensive introduction to the Dance of India.

Interwoven with the factual, historical, and descriptive material are observations, perceptions, and connections that are based on the author's experience during the summer seminar, "Continuity and Change: India on the Threshold of the 21st Century," held during the summer of 1997. These conclusions, which are necessarily from a Western point of view, might be used as starting points for discussion and debate regarding current trends in Indian dance.

**Jammin' with Shiva:**
**Tradition and Transformation of the Dance of India**

Nataraj: Lord of Dance - Shiva; this sensual and mystic image is cast in the consciousness of the Indian people as solidly as the brass that embraces its form. Indeed, the dance is a flowing symbol of the lifeblood of India, and flows through the heart of the country as sacredly as the River Ganges. The dance of Shiva is the dance of the cosmos - the eternal cycle of the universe - and is, quite simply, a metaphor for life itself. His dance is the unquestionable beginning point from which to look at the dance of India.

The five activities - the **Panchakritya** - that are reflected in the dance of Shiva are:

**srishti** - creation
**sthitiu** - preservation
**samhara** - destruction
**tirubhara** - illusion
**anugraha** - salvation

And the purposes of Shiva's dance is:
1. To reflect the rhythmic activity of the cosmos
2. To release countless souls from the snare of illusion

As one becomes familiar with the Classical, Folk, and Tribal dances of India he will perceive in them the shadows of this metaphoric dance of Shiva in their intent, spirit, and human passion.

Shiva, as part of the Hindu Trinity, also represents a primary source of literary inspiration for the creation and perpetuation of the dance in India. Approximately 83% of the Indian population is Hindu, and the majority of classical, folk, and even ritual dance forms of India are inspired by stories that lay at the foundation of Hinduism - the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which were recorded between the 3rd C. B. C. and the 2nd C. A.D. These two epics are the basis for countless interpretations from dance artists across all geographical and social strata within India. In fact, song and dance, which are rarely separated in traditional Indian culture, cannot be isolated from the literary heritage of India, for it is through

this form of storytelling that many of the great myths and legends of India were passed down for generations; they were the original technique of recording and transferring these stories before they were finally committed to script. Even today there are tribes without a vernacular script (and therefore an illiterate population), that continue to use song and dance as the sole manner of passing on stories from generation to generation. Less so in contemporary times than in the glorious past, dance has been and continues to be a functional part of Indian society. In the contemporary Western world we tend to perceive dance as "ornamental," but in India, in its traditional forms, it is clear that its essence truly remains "elemental."

The image of Shiva has retained its power to inspire an artist to aesthetic expression through movement.

**A Brief Overview of Dance in Indian History**

The statue of the bronze "Dancing Girl," from Mohenjo-daro of the Indus Civilization of 2,500 B.C., is an icon of the tradition of dance in India. Although we are not sure of the exact dance form represented by the statue, the akimbo torso is clearly a studied pose, and she reminds us that the legacy of dance in India goes back almost 4,500 years.

The dance, it has been told, descended from the heavens as it was handed to the sage Bharatha in the form of the fifth Veda from Brahma the Creator. About two millennia ago the Natyashastra, a manual of codified poses and movements written in Sanskrit, established the foundation upon which many forms of Indian Classical Dance were later developed.

The sculptural evidence that dance was central to Indian culture between the second century B.C. and the ninth century A.D., can be seen in the chiseled bas-relief *karanas* (body positions) in such significant historical locations as the caves at Aurangabad and Ellora, and many of the early Gupta temples, which amazingly remain for us to view today. The 108 *karanas* in the Nataraja Temple of Chidambaram are practically a manual of dance technique and indelibly record the importance of the dance in India's spiritual history. Concurrent with the creation of these sculptures were cave paintings and extensive Sanskrit literature where precise descriptions of dancers and dance recitals can be found.

So important was the function of dance from the tenth century A.D to the eighteenth century A.D., that countless working temples and courts across India maintained a large number of dancers as part of the *seva* (ritual) to the deity of the temple. These temple dancers, or "Devadasis," were considered female "servants of the gods," and were gifted to the temples at birth or childhood, then brought up as a member of the temple or court. Devadasis were trained to sing, dance, and perform

dramas to honor the gods. "Belonging" to the temple gods, however, they were never allowed to marry. This system unfortunately degenerated into an institutionalized form of prostitution and was eventually outlawed.

The colonization of India by the British at the beginning of the 19th Century ostensibly halted the practice of passing down cultural traditions altogether, and by the beginning of the 20th century, little was left of the dance but "a shadow of a bygone reality"[1]

Traditional dance forms experienced a renaissance after Independence in 1947, greatly due to the fact that extensive technical dance treatises were written down between 1300 A.D. and 1800 A.D. Kapila Vatsyanayn confirms, "The store-house was so rich and the layer of dust so weak that the sincere artiste had only to dig a little to discover its essential luminosity. During the past five decades, many layers of past artistic glory have been uncovered."[2] In contemporary times the dance is experienced more frequently in secular rather than religious settings, but it continues to maintain it's original essence of communication and spiritualism.

**The Training of Dancers in India today**

In ancient times dance gurus kept traditions alive through the *"Guru-Shishya Parampara,"* in which the seriously devoted students actually lived with their guru as part of a family, taking years to perfect their dance training. In return, the student cared for their Guru through household chores and earning income through dance recitals.

Today, such committed relationships are rare, and students are more likely to meet with their guru only periodically throughout the week. Although the demands of modern day life has prolonged the training process (since young people must pursue other educational endeavors in order too meet social and economic expectations), the seriousness and dedication of the training process remains intact in many regions of India.

There is a movement to recapture the *Guru-Shishya Parampara* tradition in order to

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[1]Vatsyayan, Kapila. Indian Classical Dance. New Delhi:Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. 1992.

[2]Vatsyayan, Kapila. Indian Classical Dance. New Delhi:Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. 1992.

preserve Classical Dance heritage through "Nrityagram," India's first and only dance village established to preserve traditional forms. Situated outside of Bangalore, students at Nrityagram live together as a community and their lives are completely devoted to their dance training.

Another example of such full-time devotion to a dance form is the elaborate, intensive training of a Kathakali dancer which begins about the age of ten or twelve and lasts for approximately eight years. Training institutions such as Kerala Kalamandalam and Margi Kathakali Centre have maintained strict training programs that demand residential commitment of its students as well.

It is both fascinating and inspiring for an American to witness the traditional relationship between teacher and student, *guru* and *shishya*. Any dance teacher from the western world knows that the requisite applause at the end of a dance class is a communal recognition of the work accomplished between students and teacher. But in such student-teacher relationships (where one teacher instructs perhaps twenty students simultaneously), the intimacy and ultimate respect developed in a one-on-one relationship is lost. The spiritual connection shared between teacher and student in India is remarkable to behold because it is pure and very <u>real</u>. A student is literally a disciple of a guru and honors him/her so. And that honor appears to be reciprocated from teacher to student. When a student performs in the presence of his/her guru, after the end of the performance, a ritual of thanksgiving is enacted between student and teacher. Doubtless, the investment of time and energy for both teacher and student is great, and through these rituals they seem to acknowledge that their art is ultimately something beyond their worldly, individual selves.

It is both exciting and heartening to see the young people of India carrying on Classical Dance traditions with pride and enthusiasm, many of them starting lessons as early as the age of six or seven. As is evident in school performances and informal recitals, there is healthy competition among these young performers to excel in their chosen form of expression. It seems to be very "hip" to be studying traditional dance these days. In fact, it is a curious that, although the traditional dances have as their objective to bring the worshiper (the dancer) to the Divine (specific Hindu gods), non-Hindu students are finding themselves being drawn into a life enhanced by these Classical forms. Worship is worship, and in a land of such religious diversity and tolerance, why not enjoy the best of all worlds? As young people take on the responsibilities of carrying on tradition, it is important to recognize the reality that, in order to study Classical Dance in India, the student must have the leisure time and wherewithal to study a skill of an aesthetic nature. This necessarily means that the art of classical Indian dance is being passed on through the upper classes. As is evident in many biographies, most accomplished dancers do appear to come from highly educated, economically sound backgrounds. A Classical Indian dancer who is a true artist is not just a dancer in our Western

image. An Indian Classical dancer is a musician, a poet, an actor, a dancer - in one. Thus the training must include music and singing, as well as sculpture, painting, mythology, literature, poetry, drama, and the art of make-up and adornment. When all these are mastered, then a *shishya* can become a "dancer" in the Indian perception of the word. It doesn't take a dance specialist, after seeing one inspired performance, to fully understand that in Indian Classical dance, one cannot possible execute the intricate rhythms of the dance without being a musician oneself; one cannot portray characters from literature they do not intellectually know; nor can one express feelings they do not fully understand. Renowned Bharatnatyam dancer, Geeta Chandran, believes that indeed, classically trained Indian dancers are not just dancers but "artists whose medium is dance."[3] Surely, the dramatic abilities of the dancer must be as strong as the technical elements in order to wholly perform a dance. Perhaps the extent and necessity of strong dramatic training can be inferred by the mere existence of the term *"ekalochana"* which means "the expression of two different emotions in two eyes which is made to appear simultaneous." - A daunting challenge for the most accomplished of actors! It is no wonder that it takes years to attain such artistry. But when all of these elements come together, one will certainly witness physical, intellectual, and spiritual grace - a distillation of complexities that make the dance, indisputably, fine art. Honored Odissi dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi, who just passed away during the summer of 1997, suggests that "People think that *we* are dancing. I never think I am dancing... I always feel that when *Jagannath* is there, I am offering something at the feet of the Lord, and it's by His grace that I am able to move my finger or my feet. Instead of reciting *mantras* I am doing *puja* with my dance."[4] The mastery of many layers of technique is the river to such heightened expression.

Traveling through India, one develops a great respect for sincere dedication to fine craftsmanship and sheer amounts of human labor devoted to scores of art forms practiced throughout the country. As you pass through the various "factories," you feel honored (and a bit sheepish), to be able to purchase an item that might have taken an individual one or two years to make; you admire such diligence, knowing that you would never have the patience, skill, or fortitude to create such a fine work of art. Although its "product" is not tangible, equally intense patience and effort is expected in the art of dance. Shyamala Surendran, who teaches Mohiniattam in her studio in Cochin, Kerala, notes that it usually takes four years for a student to learn basic technique before the layer of *abhinaya* (expressions) begins. Odissi dancer Kiran Segal said, of a student of hers, "She has been a disciple of mine for only six years" - and noted that she was just starting to perform for audiences. All told, It has been suggested that it takes fourteen to fifteen years to attain the requisite skills and

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[3] Delhi Times, July 6, 1997.

[4] The Times of India, July 26, 1997.

dramatic abilities to become a true dance artist. Such patience seems beyond our comprehension - yet our appreciation of the results is nonetheless absolute.

Times have changed and all traditions ultimately face the challenges and demands of the "new world." Although many dance gurus are able to maintain the traditional mode and standards of training, the enthusiasm for learning traditional dances has risen to such a fervor that many new dancers do not devote themselves exclusively to one form. Today, as Sanjukta Panigrahi regrets, "There are crash courses in dance. Dancers too want to learn like that: one year Odissi, one year Bharatnatyam, one year Kuchipudi. So nothing gets into their head. I think it is better to stick to one style. But people don't think like that nowadays; they want to master all the styles and think of how to give stage shows, how to give TV shows."[5] And so, despite the surface maintenance of traditional forms, there appears to be a concern that the infrastructure of the dance is threatened by this new mentality. Unfortunately, dance has not escaped the influences of our "more is better" world. Ms. Panigrahi also noted that many young dancers do not take the time to do their research - they have not even read the requisite traditional texts to gain a truer understanding of the characters they are portraying, and their focus is put entirely on the physical techniques. As in many parts of the world, the changing and growing "consumer" demands in India may ultimately change the path of art.

Despite the challenges that are to come, it is important to recognize that at this point in history, the renaissance of dance is flourishing in India. Exactly what inspires young Indian dancers to learn and sustain traditional forms of dance in a society when they have lost their original significance? Perhaps the desire to maintain a spiritual center amidst the chaos of clashing ideologies of Indian society; perhaps to maintain a solid connection to a discipline that was born from the soul of the Indian people, a clear identity, as the homogenization of world culture beckons them away; perhaps - it is just plain fun.

**Performances of Dance in India Today**

As is evident by the articles and reviews on dance in almost every Indian newspaper printed, Classical Dance is alive and well in India. It is still very much appreciated and well attended in most major cities. Frequent, detailed reviews demonstrate the existence of a broad population of *abhiyanas* who are able to discern the finer points of a dancer's performance. For example, a recent critique reports, "The teermanams or set rhythmic interludes linking the abhinaya segments, both in the acrhitectonic build-up of arithmetic and in spatial values which took into consideration the full performing space, impressed in conceptual design and rendition. If in the intricate

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[5] The Times of India, July 26, 1997.

arrangements of four and five made to fit a Tisram mould, the jatis were flawlessly uttered in Kanaka's nattuvangam."[6] Without a doubt, an audience member uneducated in Classical dance wouldn't even be able to understand such a review, much less agree or disagree with it!

The intricacy and specificity of a Classical Indian dance performance is indeed mesmerizing. Similar to a performance of the Western Classical Dance form, ballet, a performer is expected to achieve technical brilliance, true artistry is then revealed in the interpretation, the emotion, and the full spiritual commitment a dancer gives to his/her performance. However, unlike ballet - where youth is divine, it is apparent that Indian Classical Dance honors maturity, for it is unmistakable in performance that the depth of an artist's dancing grows richer with life experience and wisdom. When you witness a truly inspired dancer you can see three very distinct images: the legs as the earth - the factual, biological self; the torso as the river - the sensual, human element; and the arms as the wind - that which is beyond the physical self. Witnessing such a performance, one is carried away on timeless truths and experiences the highest level of *rasa* (aesthetic delight).

Dance, as any art form, is a reflection of the current social fabric. How have Indian dancers kept alive the classical forms in performance so that they are not simply museum pieces? Bharatnatyam dancer, Geeta Chandran suggests, "Today's dancers are educated, empowered and hold their own points of view. The dance is so wonderfully expressive that it can be ably used to share intellectual ideas with the audience. Women's empowerment, gender issues, environmental concerns -- all can be presented in Bharatnatyam. However, what is crucial is that the aesthetic compact must never be frayed." [7] The tales evolve while the language remains.

In contrast to such inspired and inspiring concert performances, there is evidence of dances forms becoming commercialized and "sanitized" to entertain the tourist market. Just about every major hotel has access to and employs "dance troupes" to entertain their patrons. Unfortunately, in some cases, these troupes are groups of young people putting on costumes and going through the motions to make a rupee, not dancers committed to their art. The hotel and tourist industry in general would be wise to pay attention to their contribution to the degradation of such rich cultural treasures - tourists are not that easily fooled and take away strong (sometimes negative) impressions from such performances. The Dance, as a part of cultural heritage that can easily be shared with tourists, if shared properly, will serve as an elegant ambassador, and a gateway to understanding the ethos of the Indian people.

**Major Classical Dance Forms**

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[6] The Hindu, July 11, 1997.

[7] Delhi Times, July 16, 1997.

**Bharat Natyam** - Tamil Nadu

Perhaps the most widely known of the Indian dance forms due to its proliferation and popularity in countries outside of India. It is also one of the oldest of classical Indian dance forms. This form is characterized by it's use of the *hasta mudras* or codified hand gestures. It is danced by both men and women. Traditionally, the solo dancer represents all of the characters of the story .

**Kathakali** - Kerala

A dance-drama form that uses elaborate costumes, stylized painted make-up and exceptional use of the eyes. It is traditionally performed by men only. Authentic performances of Kathakali are most often presented at religious festivals. Kathakali performances, which tell tales of the Ramayana, last about ten hours, starting at 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening and playing through into the morning hours. These performances are popularly attended by the masses. Some plays in the Kathakali repertoire last up to 30 hours, stretching over several consecutive nights.

**Kathak** - Uttar Pradesh

A story-telling dance form which is mimetic in quality. It is characterized by rhythmic footwork and circular pirouettes. Kathak is danced by both men and women and is danced in solo, duet, and group compositions. Kathak in it's present form is was greatly transformed by Mughal influences. It is characteristically performed with straighter legs that many other Classical Indian forms.

**Krishnaattam** - Kerala

A dance-drama form which preceded Kathakali. This form focuses on the theme of Krishna.

**Kuchipudi** - Andhra Pradesh

A dance-drama form dating back to the 17th century. Kuchipudi was performed only by men in ancient days when it was known as *Bhakti*. Kuchipudi is characterized by vigorous, curvilinear movements and vertical jumps. Kuchipudi has evolved into a dominance of solo repertoire along with the more traditional dance-dramas. The performer may also sing or speak along with the dance. Women's roles are frequently impersonated by men.

**Kuruvanji** - Tamil Nadu

Kuruvanji expresses basic love stories, generally following the formula of the love of the heroine (a goddess, princess, or noblewoman) for a hero ( a god, a king, or a nobleman).

**Manipuri** - Manipur

A graceful style danced by both men and women. It is focused on themes of Rada and Krishna. The use of ornamented, starched skirts are characteristic of this form.

**Mohini Attam (or Mohiniyattam)** - Kerala

A relatively new form, Mohini Attam was formalized during the eighteenth century. It is traditionally a solo style performed by women only, Mohini Attam is a graceful dance that uses soft, undulating movements of the body. Quite appropriately, it is recognized as the "dance of the celestial nymph."

**Odissi** - Orissa

Odissi dates back to the 2nd C. B.C. and was originated in Temples of Orissa. It is dedicated to the deity *Jagannath* (Lord of the Universe) and is based on the famous sculptures of the temples of Orissa. Odissi can be recognized by its characteristic isolation of the torso and hip deflection. This is known as the *tribhanga* - or 3-bend posture of the body. Stories told in Odissi are influenced by the Gita Govinda, a love poem about Radha and Krishna written in 12th century Sanskrit by Jayadeva. Odissi is traditionally danced by women only, however, in the 17th century, *gotipua* boys dressed up as girls to perform this style. It has been described as a dance technique that has the ability to "manifest erotic sentiment in a deeply reverential manner."

**Yakshagana** - Andhra Pradesh

Yashagana is a dance-opera form. The dance in Yakshagana is not as intricately technical as other forms. Although it puts emphasis on footwork, it does not employ hasta mudras to any extent. More emphasis is put on the story telling rather than *nritta*.

**Tribal and Folk Dance forms in Contemporary India**

Tribal and folk forms of dance in India still maintain a functional role in some village societies. They celebrate or recognize seasons, harvest, birth, marriage, and death, as well as chase away demons and invoke good spirits. They are a unifying factor within the lives of rural and tribal peoples. Such dances are usually characterized by a minimum of established steps so that they may be enjoyed by a general community of participants without excessive technical demand. By nature, tribal and folk forms are passed on without any "formal" training. The "training" is usually community oriented and experiential. The majority of tribal and folk forms also involve singing by the dancers, and, due to their repetitive nature, are meant to be participatory rather than "performed" dances.

Recognizing that the economic pressures of the "new world" are taking their toll on history by weaning younger tribal generations away from their rich literary and artistic heritage, Professor Ganesh N. Devy has established the Bahasha Research and Publication Center. Through the efforts of the Center, tribal elders will be paid to teach their folk arts, music and dance to the younger generation, and detailed documentation will be made to assure that these rich traditions are not lost in the

tidal wave of modern "development." [8]

Due to the extreme diversity of ethnolinguistic groups in India, there are hundreds of Indian tribal and folk forms. A few examples of these diverse forms are:

**Bhangra** - Punjab -
Bhangra commemorates the harvest season of *Baisakhi*. It is performed mainly by men and demonstrates individual displays of strength and energy. Many leaps and jumps and balancing of dancers on each other's shoulders are characteristic of Bhangra.

**Garba**- Gujarat -
Garba is a clapping dance that is performed in a circle. This dance is usually danced on *Navratri* by women only.

**Giddha** - a women's dance characterized by its graceful movements, usually danced at weddings.

**Dandya Ras** - Gujarat
Dandya Ras is a stick dance executed in a circle, traditionally by men only. It is performed in praise of Lord Krishna.

**Koklikatai** - Tamil Nadu
A dance in which the dancers are on stilts tied with bells.

**Lavni** - Maharashtra
This dance emphasizes erotic, acrobatic movements and gestures.

**Mayurbhanj Chhau** - Orissa
A dance the demonstrates mock combat. No masks are used.

**Purulia Chhau** - West Bengal -
Purulia Chhau uses mythological themes that demonstrate the triumph of good over evil. Mock fighting dominates the form. Dancers often impersonate a god, animal, bird or flower by the use of elaborate masks and are accompanied by instrumental music. All Chhau forms incorporate *pharikhandas* - a system of exercises that was important in the training of soldiers.

**Rauf** - Kashmir
Rauf is a seasonal dance in which the dancers link their arms and glide forward and backward

Rajasthani folk dances such as **Chari ,Gair, Gavri, Ghoomra, Jhamar, Terahtali, and Walar,** are known for using various props such as pots with candles, shards of glass, and swords.

**Seraikell Chhau** -Bihar
A masked dance form dance traditionally carried out by royalty. It uses mock combat as it's main focus.

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[8] Elle (India), July, 1997.

**Dance in Contemporary, Urban India - Popular Films and Television**

As in its relationship with global technology and consumer trade, India is not a country to jump to the conclusion that foreign is necessarily better. Quite to the contrary, India has not lost sight of the intrinsic value of traditional dance. Although dance has found it's way into popular media, tradition dies hard, and it seems, has no intention of "turning turtle," as the Indians say. Even though it is cross-bred with western trends in popular dance, the spirit of tradition is alive and well in it's new adaptations. Of course, the gods who are celebrated in film and television are the new gods of commerce.

Song and dance have been embraced by the Indian culture as accepted convention in popular film making. "Bollywood" (the burgeoning film industry in Mumbai) produces scores of films that employ dance as an essential part of its marketable product. Long out of favor with Western audiences, the film musical in India is standard fare and continues to bring in millions to the, often sold out, movie houses. When one citizen was asked, "will there be singing and dancing in this film?", he replied with a question, " Is it a Hindi movie?" , "Yes." , "Then, of course!"

In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, one must look back to when the movie musical (decidedly American!) was at its height of popularity - during the depression and during periods of war. That popularity declined with the rise of relative prosperity of the middle class. In parallel view, the daily lives of the majority of the Indian people is today, less than ideal. Political, environmental, and social concerns are ever pervasive - it is no wonder that the escapism of such popular entertainment should be relevant and perhaps even necessary. Americans, inculcated by the aesthetic of realism or at the very least "verisimilitude" in the film industry, find it very difficult to accept production numbers of song and dance integrated with martial warfare, (including decapitation) as is the case in the recently successful VIRASAT. It is fascinating to note, however, that Hindi movies have become popular "underground" diversions in many American urban areas - perhaps for the same need of escapism in similarly difficult times. Pure violence has taken over escapist entertainment in the U.S.A. - the music and dance (added to the violence, in some cases) of Hindi films is enjoyed by those who are willing to suspend their disbelief for a few minutes of pure entertainment.

With 1,652 acknowledged mother tongues and twelve major recognized languages within the country, it is easy to understand that action, (physical humor, violence, slapstick) song and dance are the key elements to making a film most widely marketable in India. Hindi is only spoken by approximately 38% of the population, and English by a maximum of 5%. Given the reality of the co-existence of so many languages and dialects, it is clear why music, dance, and imagery has become the "solution" to crossing the many language barriers.

What kinds of dance are seen in these films? Certainly a cornucopia of styles, very often a blend of both classical and folk forms, integrated with more characteristically "western" styles. Film actress/choreographer Debasree Roy notes that rather than confining herself to Indian classical dance, she is more interested in evolving a fusion of East and West. And it is this kind of dance that sells in the mass market of film making. Purists surely quiver at the "bastardization" of their sacred forms. But people want to see tradition reflected in these dances - it is a part of their identity, their heritage, and they aren't willing to let it go entirely. Indubitably, popular Indian culture can be summed up in the metaphor of "jammin' with Shiva."

Of course there are also "westernized" music and dance sequences as well, relying more heavily on "musical theatre" and street/jazz type of dancing. A current film that features this "cosmopolitan" type of dancing is Dil To Pagal Hai, a "young talent gets her big break (and the love of the director) when the star breaks her leg" movie. Original, no. But nonetheless, a plot that promises lots of music and dance - and a popular movie that many will flock to see.

The demand for stars in these films once again requires a "total" performer - one who can act, dance, and sing - much like a classical dancer...in a very different medium. "Pop" film stars such as Govinda and Sridevi currently dominate popular films. It is apparent that many of these film stars (especially women) have not studied classical dance extensively, but the intent is there, and certainly the audiences are different than those who are able to debate the success of a "real" dancer's *jati*. New forms have molded to the new expectations.

VTV, India's own MTV(music video station), also demonstrates a fusion of American jazz dance styles with classical and folk forms of Indian Dance. The percussive, shape oriented forms of Classical Indian Dance are perfectly adapted to contemporary jazz dance used with popular music. Lateral head isolations and *mudras* used in percussive isolation are characteristic of much of the popular choreography of these works. The music video of "Oye Shaava" a popular song by Indian pop star Raageswari released in 1997, demonstrates a hip-hop movement basis (and many reflections of Michael Jackson), with the addition of clearly defined mudras. Accents of movement on the upbeat (syncopation), characteristic of jazz dance, are also prevalent in much of the choreography. With the advent of cable TV in the past three to four years, as of 1997, approximately 18 million homes have access to VTV. It will be interesting to watch the influences of widespread exposure to western commercial dance, as access continues to grow. Will VTV continue to maintain it's personal flair with the integration of traditional dance forms? Or (disregarding language), will we no longer to be able to tell if we are in India or the United Kingdom when we turn on the music video station?

Dance is currently being used to enhance the marketing tactics of the total mass entertainment industry in India. The film industry, VTV, and the recording

industry have developed a wonderfully successful symbiotic relationship, which, in a nutshell, is as follows: Song and dance production numbers from major films are aired separately as music videos on VTV, this entices potential audience members to go see the film; once they see the film, they purchase the soundtrack. As a matter of fact, movie soundtracks, and dance remixes of favorite songs from movie soundtracks are consistently the top selling audio recordings in the country. The visual element, in short, sells the audio element. It appears that the film, television, and the recording industry have established a trinity as rock solid as the Hindu gods.

An interesting phenomenon in the development of the popularity of the "new dance" in India, which, undoubtedly has been inspired through VTV - is a popular television show that features a lip sync contest. In this show the contestants are primarily male and the competition lies in the fact that the contestants must dance well to win (since they do not actually sing). In the U.S.A. such a television show would most likely draw an audience of young women, but in an observation of this phenomenon in a public location, it was interesting to note that the observers, who were enjoying themselves most thoroughly, were a group of adult men.

Night clubs that house contemporary social dancing are gaining popularity in large urban areas such as Mumbai and Calcutta. The "folk" dancing there is much like any other night club in the Western world. In fact, one's very presence at a night club suggests being "hip" and westernized. Short skirts, tight jeans, and sleeveless or even shoulderless garments are more prevalent there than in the mainstream of Indian life. "Dance mixes" from popular film songs are all the rage, again continuing the cycle of mutual support within the entertainment industry.

**Indian Dance on the International Scene**

Classical Indian Dance is currently enjoying a growing popularity on the world dance scene. Professional dance companies established by Indian immigrants have begun to flourish in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Perhaps its popularity is part of the current Western fever for percussive dance forms, such as American Rhythm Tap, demonstrated in the success of such Broadway shows as Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk; Irish Step Dancing, featured in the celebrated Riverdance; and the "blue collar" percussive dance of the Australian "Tap Dogs." Or perhaps, on the opposite side of the spectrum, it is simply the search for spirituality, which is experienced when watching an inspired performance, that draws Western audiences to its performances. Most likely, it is a confluence of the two.

When considering the popularity of Indian dance with relatively "uneducated" (in the language of Indian classical dance) Western audiences, one must recognize the fact that the nature of American Jazz Music/Tap Dance and Classical Indian Music/Dance have a shared aesthetic in it's spirit of improvisation. In both forms, the musician and dancers become one, reading and working off of one another. Indian performing artists refer to this as the art of spontaneity - being in the moment, being one with the music and the"muses" that bring one to a higher level of artistry. The immediacy and artistic brilliance that supports such skills of improvisation appear to be key elements that keep Classical Indian Dance a dynamic rather than static form in contemporary times - and very popular within artistic circles in urban areas of the U.S.A.

Classical Indian Dance is experiencing transformations as it develops in Western cultures, such as the blending of techniques and the use of group dynamics. Some of this may be due to the fact of the changing backgrounds of the *rasikas* - or audience members. In traditional Indian dance, the *rasika* is expected to be as familiar with the technique as the dancers themselves. Enjoying the finer elements of technique is a learned appreciation and pure form is celebrated. But the audiences of the West do not have the patience or inclination to learn these technical elements. When Classical Indian Dance is performed outside of India it is quite distanced from it's spiritual beginnings both in geography and intended audience, and in order to be received well, it must adjust to meet the confines of a Western aesthetic. New choreographers face the challenge of staying true to their art form, while expanding their horizons to capture the interest of the MTV generation. Ranee Ramaswamy, Artistic Director and choreographer for Ragamala Music and Dance Theater, recently presented a production entitled "Rain Seed" which told the Indian folk tale of Mala, a girl who yearns to become a boy in order to defeat an evil demon and return the rain seed that the demon has stolen from her village. In order to reach her American audience, her production employs non-traditional text and singing, as well as group dances that work in counterpoint variation. She has taken tradition and added levels of communication to adapt to the "new" *rasika*.

**A Happy Conclusion**

Traditional Indian dance has survived millennia. It's foundation in spiritualism, which is at the heart of the dance forms, assures that it will not disappear as quickly as it has in other changing cultures. Fortunately for India, religious faith and national pride show noble resistance to the outside world. Fortunately for a spiritually starving world, there is an art form that allows us to experience an intangible and valuable commodity that we have all but lost. In its many forms, Indian dance brings us back to our most primitive and yet most elevated human instincts. Whether it is in it's pure state, or in integrated with "universal forms," Indian dance will continue too enthrall and inspire for many generations to come.

Exactly what is "Indian Dance"? A title of a work by choreographer Ranee Ramaswamy perhaps best describes it: "A Painting in Motion, Whose Poetry Breathes Music." Indeed.

**The dancing foot, the sound of tinkling bells**
**The songs that are sung and the varying steps**
**The form assumed by our Dancing Gurupara**
**Find out these within yourself, then shall your fetters fall away**
**-Hindu Scriptures-**

**A Basic Glossary of Indian Dance Terms**

**Abhinaya -** aesthetic communication
**Abhyasa** - practice/training
**Aharya** - body transformation
**Aharyabhinaya** - body transformation through costume and make-up
**Andavus** - body positions
**Angika** - the body and limbs
**Angikabhinaya** - communication through body kinetics
**Arangetram** - The point at which a student of the dance is ready to "ascend the stage" and presents a solo recital to the public.
**Attom** - a dance performance
**Bhavam -** facial expressions
**Chakkar** - pirouettes performed in quick succession
**Guru** - "remover of darkness" - used for a teacher of any subject.
**Hasta Mudra -** a codified language of hand gestures used by many Classical Indian Dance forms
**Karanas** - major positions or stances in Indian Classical Dance
**Karayitri** - imagination or imaginative action of a performer
**Lasya** - female element - soft and graceful
**Leh** - tempo
**Naayika** - a dancer
**Naayak** - the Supreme Lover/ The Divine Lord
**Natya** - Dramatic dance that integrates language with movement
**Natya Shastra** - The ancient treatise, written nearly two thousand years ago, that is the foundation of Classical Indian Dance
**Nava Rasas** - nine basic emotions expressed in Classical Indian Dance forms
Adbhuta/Ashcharya (wonder)
Bhibatsa (disgust)
Bhaya (fear)
Hasya (happiness)
Karuna (compassion)
Krodha (anger)
Shanta (serenity)
Shoka (sorrow)
Viram (courage)
**Nritta** - Pure and simple dance - movement for movement's sake
**Nritya** - Dance performed to convey a theme or story - Nritya uses facial expressions, codified hand gestures and symbolic poses to convey dramatic action and emotions.
**Raga -** Melody or Song
**Rasa** - Essence, emotion, expression of rapture, or positive aesthetic response.
**Rashika -** audience members who are learned in dance and appreciate its complexities and nuances.

**Satvika** - moods and emotions
**Seva** - Ritual
**Shishya** - a pupil or disciple of a guru
**Taal** - rhythm
**Tandava** - masculine principle- heroic, bold, vigorous
**Tatkar** - fast, complex foot- work
**Vichika** - song and speech

## INDIAN DANCE RESOURCES

**A few Indian Dance Companies in the United States available for residencies and performances:**

- Abhinaya Dance Company
  476 Park Ave. , Suite # 226
  San Jose, CA 95110
  (408) 993-9231
  Fax (408) 446-0433
  Artistic Director: Mythili Kumar
- Ragamala Dance Theatre - Minneapolis, MN
  13720 James Avenue South
  Minneapolis, MN 55337
  Artistic Director: Ranee Ramaswamy
-Natyakalalayam Dance Company
  4753 North Broadway, Suite 918
  Chicago, IL 60640
  (630) 323-7835
  (773)907-2191
  fax (773) 907-2184
- Nritya Jyoti - Minneapolis, MN
  Artistic Director: Rita Mustaphi

**Audio/Visual Resources:**
Excellent materials for teaching are available through:
Centre for Cultural Resources and Training,
Bahawalpur House, Bhagwandas Road
New Dehli 110001 - INDIA

These materials include:
- Slides on the Performing Arts
- Regional Songs Part 1 and 2
- Video Cassettes: Nati Dance - Himachal Pradesh
  Purulia Chhau - Mask Dance of West Bengal
  Saraikella Chhau - Mask Dance of Bihar
  Odissi Dance part 1 and part 2
  Bharatnatyam Dance
  Ramayana-Balkanda part 1 and 2
- Calendar-sized photograph collections
  Kathak Dance
  Manipuri Dance
  Kathakali Dance
  Bharatnatyam Dance
  Kuchipudi Dance
  Odissi Dance

CD-Rom Bharata Natyam: Indian Classical Dance
available from:
Info-drive Software Ltd. 91, V.M. Street, Mylapore,
Madras, India 600 004
Fax: (91) (044) 8557004
e-mail: infodrive@pobox.com

Video of Music Clips from Indian popular film - A must to show the integration of traditional and western commercial forms! Check the WWW for the current top 10 Hindi films.

**An exceptional book available in India:**
A new anthology of articles on Indian Performing Arts was published in 1997. This collection of articles by various writers covers aesthetic issues, articles on specific Classical, Folk, and Ritual forms, as well as biographical articles and dance criticism. It would be of interest to those who are able to go more deeply into specific areas of Indian Dance.
Rasa - The Indian Performing Arts in the Last Twenty-five years, Volume I (Music and Dance), Ed. Mukherjee, Bimal and Kothari, Sunil. Anamika Kala Sangham Research and Publications, 4 Bishop Lefroy Road, Calcutta - 700020 - 1500 rupees (around $43 U.S)

**Teaching Materials available in the U.S.A.**

CD-Rom Indian Classical Dance
available from:
Anchlsoft
2165 Silkwood Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80920
(800) 593-9454

The Cosmic Dance of Shiva - Videotape - 30 minutes
available from:
Insight Media
2162 Broadway
New York, NY 10024-6224
Fax: (212) 799-5309

Marg Publications, a Bombay based company has an office in the USA and offers the following artistic publications:

For Kathakali -
-Marg - a magazine of the arts - Volume XLIV No. 4 - Kathakali: A Three-dimensional Art.
*This is an excellent edition with specific articles that cover many key aspects of Kathakali, including training, , philosophy, textual resources, and performers. The training photographs are exceptional as most publications only show performance aspects.*

-Marg - a magazine of the arts - Volume XLIV No. 1 - Kathakali: the Aesthetics of Communication

-Kathakali: The Art of the Non-worldly Edited by D. Appukuttan Nair and K. Ayyappa Paniker.

-Oddisi - Indian Classical Dance Art, Dr. Sunil Kothari and Avinash Pasricha

Marg Publications
c/o Mr. Jimmy Batliwala
Tata Incorporated
101 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10178
(212) 557-7979

The future looks bright.